



CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, MAY 29, 1981

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Drive In—It's Joy Week!

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A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON MILLER

TWO SCOOPS: Both *The Front Page* and *His Girl Friday* are in the public domain now, so the local cheapie channel played both within a few days of each other, giving those interested a chance to study and compare.

When it appeared in 1928, *The Front Page* was hailed as the definitive play about newspapermen. There have been other worthy examples -- *Gentlemen of the Press* is one such -- but Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's ribald, rollicking serio-comic saga of Hildy Johnson, who wants to quit reporting and get married, and Walter Burns, his managing editor who won't let him, has endured. Lee Tracy's performance as Hildy made him a Broadway star, and Osgood Perkins made a Walter Burns for all others to emulate.

They said it couldn't be filmed. Too much rapid-fire dialogue, much of it too close to the borderline. In the early talkie days, the movies were forced to slow down while the actors enunciated for the microphone. As a result, pace was slowed to a stately walk. Not a proper state for a narrative where everybody had to say their lines as fast as possible, and often at the top of their lungs. But Howard Hughes was young, and wealthy, and wanted to make movies and didn't care about any obstacles or taboos. He had the film rights to *The Front Page*, and he had a director, Lewis Milestone, who had done some pretty good silents for him, like *Two Arabian Knights* and *The Racket*. Milestone could direct comedy, and he knew his way around a camera. Hughes signed him to direct *The Front Page*, and Milestone showed he knew something about the sound track, too.

Milestone uses the opening sequences to broaden the one-set play, moving his camera in his favorite long lateral pans following the actors; putting the camera in moving elevators; bouncing it like a rubber ball from actor to actor. Once into the meat of the story, which takes place in the press room of the Criminal Courts building, he concentrates on directing the players, and elicits fine jobs from Pat O'Brien (his pic debut) as Hildy and Adolphe Menjou as Burns, as well as the assorted reporters like Edward Everett Horton (the prissy Bensinger), Walter Catlett and others. The early camera hijinks now seem a mite ostentatious and detract rather than enhance, but in a 1931 frame of reference, *The Front Page* is often remarkable.

Howard Hawks took *The Front Page* to remake in 1939, with the inspired idea of making Hildy Johnson a woman, Hildebrand to Hildegard. With Rosalind Russell in the part and Cary Grant giving a bravura comedy performance as Walter Burns, *His Girl Friday*, as it was retitled, retains the sock of the original and adds some of its own. It's an improvement, and Hawks's

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P-D TOPICS

FROM MARIO DE MARCO, of W. Boylston, Mass., comes word of a new publishing venture: "In the past I have published books on Buck Jones, Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, Col. Tim McCoy and Hoot Gibson. My new one is "Battling Bob" Bob Steele, which contains 100 glossy pages (9"x11"), over 150 rare photos, biography of Bob, and also Charley King (his sparring partner), filmography and more. The book is \$7.25 which covers the postage and handling.

"These books are published solely for the western film buff -- and each sale depends on the previous one being published. I surely would appreciate a plug for your Canadian western movie fans. The Bob Steele book is the best (in my opinion) of the six books -- but here again I am a strong Steele fan."

Mario's new book can be ordered from: Mario DeMarco, 152 Maple St., W. Boylston, Mass. 01583.

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THE PULP ERA: PULPCON 10, devoted to the gone but certainly not forgotten era of pulp magazines (The Shadow, Doc Savage, G-8, Black Mask...), is being held this year from Aug. 13 to 16 in Cherry Hill, N.J. A press release states: "This year's guest of honor, Mr. Jerome G. Rozen, has promised Tony Tollin, our program chairman, 8 or 10 paintings to be auctioned. We are currently working on a schedule of events. At this time, we have a slide show, a panel discussion, movies, two auctions, and the banquet. The first auction will be a catalogued sale with no commission charged. We intend to charge a 10 per cent commission on the second auction..." For further info, and a registration form, write: PULPCON 10, 110 West Fifth St., Dayton, Ohio 45402, or phone (513) 222-1479 or (513) 278-7774.

DON MILLER continued

handling becomes more impressive with each viewing, switching from comedy to drama and back sometimes within the same scene, always deftly. The dialogue is the fastest-paced on the screen, approached only by Billy Wilder's One, Two, Three years later in rapidity.

Wilder made a more recent version of The Front Page with Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau that completely misfired, and will not be dealt with here, since everyone is entitled to a mistake now and then.

PETE HARRIS

RIDIN' THE RANGE: Mention the nickname "Rough Riders" and, depending on the circumstances, you're liable to get any one of four responses. To a sports fan, it's the name of two of the nine teams in the Canadian Football League -- Ottawa Rough Riders and Saskatchewan Roughriders (one word). To a history buff, it's the name of the volunteer cavalry unit Teddy Roosevelt helped to recruit during the Spanish-American War. To a TV trivialist, it's the name of a short-lived western series in the late 1950s with Kent Taylor, Jan Merlin and Peter Whitney as Civil War veterans headin' west. And, to a B-Western aficionado, it's the name of the trigger trio portrayed by Buck Jones, Tim McCoy and Raymond Hatton in an eight-film Monogram series made in 1941-42. Leaving sports, history and TV for the time being, let's take a look at the Monogram Rough Riders.

Although they have a tendency to bog down at times, the entries I've seen have a certain aura because of the combination of screen veterans Jones, McCoy and Hatton as lawmen working undercover. The basic premise was virtually carved in stone: Buck, in the role of Buck Roberts, would pose as an outlaw to gain the confidence of the baddies; Tim, as Tim McCall, would arrive on the scene in the guise of a gambler, gunslinger or preacher, and Hatton, as Sandy Hopkins, would be lurking somewhere in the vicinity as a drifter, saloon swamper, cook, prospector or peddler. Sooner or later, they would get together, compare notes, and proceed to lower the boom on the heavies. And, at the end, when the gunsmoke had cleared, the three would ride off in three different directions ... until the next time.

The eight Rough Riders entries, all produced by Scott R. Dunlap and written by Jess Bowers, are:

ARIZONA BOUND (1941), directed by Spencer Bennet. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Tris Coffin, Dennis Moore, Luana Walters, Slim Whitaker, I. Stanford Jolley.

THE GUNMAN FROM BODIE (1941), directed by Spencer Bennet. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Dave O'Brien, Christine McIntyre, Robert Frazer, John Merton.

FORBIDDEN TRAILS (1941), directed by Robert N. Bradbury. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Tris Coffin, Charles King, Glenn Strange, Lynton Brent, Dave O'Brien.

BELOW THE BORDER (1942), directed by Howard Bretherton. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Linda Brent, Charles King, Dennis Moore, Roy Barcroft, Ted Mapes.

GHOST TOWN LAW (1942), directed by Howard Bretherton. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Virginia Carpenter, Murdock McQuarrie, Charles King, Tom London.

DOWN TEXAS WAY (1942), directed by Howard Bretherton. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Dave O'Brien, Luana Walters, Glenn Strange, Harry Woods, Tom London.

RIDERS OF THE WEST (1942), directed by Howard Bretherton. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Dennis Moore, Christine McIntyre, Harry Woods, Walter McGrail.

WEST OF THE LAW (1942), directed by Howard Bretherton. Jones, McCoy, Hatton, Evelyn Cook, Milburn Morante, Harry Woods, Roy Barcroft.